

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 INT-05 IO-13
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FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6127
INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
USMISSION USNATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 7779

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, RO
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF LABOR COMMENTS IN JIU VALLEY COAL MINERS

REF: BUCHAREST 7495

1. SUMMARY. IN CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR OCTOBER 20,
MINISTER OF LABOR (AND TRADE UNION CHIEF) GHEORGHE PANA DISCUSSED
VARIOUS ASPECTS OF JIU VALLEY COAL MINERS SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. PENSION LAW, HE ARGUED, IS BOTH PROGRESSIVE AND EQUITABLE;
HUMANS, HOWEVER, ARE SUBJECTIVE AND THINK IN TERMS OF THEIR
INDIVIDUAL SITUATION. GOVERNMENT MUST TAKE A BROADER APPROACH
AND CONSIDER ALL ASPECTS OF THE NATIONAL INTEREST. THIS IS
THE GENERAL CONTEXT IN WHICH COAL MINERS SITUATION HAS BEEN
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APPROACHED BY GOR AND SHOULD BE VIEWED BY OTHERS.

3. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INCLUDING HIMSELF HAVE GONE TO JIU
VALLEY TO EXPLAIN NOT ONLY PENSION LAW BUT ENTIRE PACKAGE
OF MEASURES INCLUDING WAGE INCREASES, FAMILY BENEFITS, ETC.
TO RAISE WORKERS' STANDARD OF LIVING AND CONVINCE THEM ABOUT
THEIR PROPER ROLE IN ESSENTIAL DRIVE TOWARD ECONOMIC

DEVELOPMENT. ROMANIA'S NEED FOR A GROWING LABOR FORCE, THE SPECIAL NEED TO ATTRACT AND KEEP SKILLED WORKERS IN SUCH DIFFICULT INDUSTRIAL SECTORS AS MINING, AND THE NEED TO STRIKE A MORE EQUITABLE BALANCE AMONG THOSE WORKERS WITH LARGE PENSIONS AND THOSE WITH SMALL ONES WERE PARTICULARLY STRESSED. ADMITTEDLY, AT TIMES THE DISCUSSIONS BECAME "TOUGH" (ASPRA). SITUATION WAS ALSO COMPLICATED BY SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF PERSONS CLAIMING DISABILITY PENSIONS FOR EITHER SLIGHT OR NON-EXISTANT ILLNESSES AS WELL AS "FLOATING" POPULATION OF PERSONS WHO SEEK TO WORK IN MINES FOR SHORT PERIODS IN HOPES OF QUALIFYING FOR HIGH WAGES, PENSIONS, AND OTHER BENEFITS. FINALLY, CENTRAL LEADERS HAD DISCOVERED THAT CERTAIN REAL AND ILLEGAL ABUSES WERE OCCURRING: OBLIGATORY SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS IN A WORK WEEK OF FIVE EIGHT-HOUR DAYS.

4. REPEATEDLY REFERRING TO RFE COVERAGE WHICH HE TERMED GROSSLY EXAGGERATED (BUT SHOWING HE WAS KEENLY AWARE OF THE BROADCASTS), PANA VIGOROUSLY DENIED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A STRIKE OR ANYTHING CLOSE TO IT. HE ALSO DENIED THAT MINERS HAD HELD GOR LEADERS "HOSTAGE"; THERE HAD BEEN NO "IMPRISONMENT" OR "DETENTION." HE ALSO DISAGREED WITH AMBASSADOR'S OBSERVATION THAT FULL TREATMENT OF SITUATION IN ROMANIA MEDIA COULD HELP SPIKE THE MYRIAD RUMORS CURRENT IN BUCHAREST, ARGUING THAT TO DO SO WOULD ONLY "AGITATE THE SITUATION" AND USELESSLY "STIR UP SPIRITS." ADMITTING THAT THE GOR CAREFULLY SELECTS THE NEWS IT CHOOSES TO DISSEMINATE, HE ADDED CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT THE COAL MINERS SITUATION, AND BY IMPLICATION OTHER EXAMPLES OF WORKER RESTIVENESS, WOULD NOT BE ON THE ACCEPTABLE LIST OF NEWSWORTHY ITEMS.

5. WHAT HAD HAPPENED, PANA SAID, WAS THAT HE AND OTHER LEADERS HAD TALKED FRANKLY WITH THE WORKERS--HE HAD THE IMPRESSION HE HAD TALKED TO ALL OF THEM--; COMRADE CEAUSESCU HAD TALKED TO THEM, "AND THEN TALKED TO THEM AGAIN;" AND STEPS HAVE NOW BEEN TAKEN TO REMEDY THE "INTOLERABLE SITUATION." ABUSES HAD BEEN BROUGHT TO THE (LOCAL) COMRADES' ATTENTION, AND HAD BEEN CORRECTED. THE NEW PENSION LAW, RAISING THE LOWEST PENSIONS AND KEEPING THE HIGHEST WHERE THEY WERE (SINCE THEY COULD NOT BE LOWERED) HAD BEEN PASSED; SALARIES WOULD BE RAISED, PERHAPS AT THE NATIONAL PARTY CONFERENCE IN DECEMBER; AND A NEW LAW OR DECREE STRENGTHENING THE GOVERNMENT'S CAPACITY TO CHANNEL THE LABOR FORCE INTO PRIORITY BRANCHES WAS BEING WORKED ON, ALTHOUGH HE COULD NOT SAY WHEN IT WOULD BE ANNOUNCED. THE JIU VALLEY PROBLEM, HE CONCLUDED, HAD BEEN RESOLVED.

6. COMMENT: AS OUR PREVIOUS REPORTING ON THIS SUBJECT SHOWS, PANA IS BEING LESS THAN TOTALLY CANDID WITH US. OUR ESTIMATE IS THAT SITUATION IS MORE SERIOUS THAN HE DESCRIBES

AND THAT ALL PROBLEMS WITH JIU MINERS OR OTHERS ARE NOT NECESSARILY RESOLVED, A FACT PANA IMPLICITLY ACKNOWLEDGES BY HIS REFUSAL TO ALLOW ANY ROMANIA MEDIA ATTENTION TO SITUATION FOR FEAR OF POSSIBLE DEMONSTRATION EFFECT AMONG OTHER WORKERS. FINALLY, PANA WAS WILLING ENOUGH TO DESCRIBE THE CURRENT STRUCTURAL SITUATION--"THE VILLAGE IS EXHAUSTED," HE SAID; INDUSTRIAL WORKERS ARE NO LONGER FRESH FROM THE FARM; THE WORKING CLASS NOW INCLUDES HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SKILLED AND EDUCATED WORKERS; AND MORE MATERIAL BENEFITS HERE AND NOW ARE NEEDED TO MAKE IT UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THE CONTINUING EFFORT REQUIRED--BUT HE HAD NOT YET BEGUN TO ARTICULATE THE LONGER-TERM CONSEQUENCES FOR THE ROMANIAN ECONOMY AND ROMANIAN POLITICS.

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